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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 000881

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TAGS: [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: BRITISH STUDY PROGRAMS MOVING FORWARD

REF: A. A) DAO TASHKENT 290405Z MAR 06

[B. B\) 05 TASHKENT 2233](#)

[C. C\) TASHKENT 808](#)

[D. D\) TASHKENT 634](#)

Classified By: AMB. JON R. PURNELL, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Despite an often rocky Uzbek-British relationship, British sources in Tashkent indicate that the GOU has not imposed direct obstacles to study programs in the UK. A scholarship program jointly supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Open Society Institute, and a consortium of British universities awarded a dozen scholarships for Masters degree programs in 2006. An MFA official has been approved for graduate study in the UK under the FCO-sponsored Chevening program. Several children of top GOU officials are studying at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT), the only university in Central Asia offering British qualifications. However, the British Embassy's decision to shut its visa section has forced Uzbek students to travel to Almaty, creating significant inconvenience. In addition, the British Council has faced some difficulties with English language programs, most notably the cancellation of a training course for the Ministry of Defense. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Despite a strained Uzbek-British relationship, marked most recently by the GOU's refusal to accredit a British Defense attache (ref A), there are no apparent direct GOU efforts to prevent students from studying in the UK. Sources at the British Embassy, British Council, and a British university in Tashkent told Poloff that study programs to the United Kingdom are moving forward. A scholarship program jointly sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Open Society Institute (OSI), and a consortium of British Universities (Oxford, St. Andrews, Manchester, Essex) will provide ten to twelve places for graduate study at British universities this year. (Note: The British DCM confided to Poloff that the GOU may not be fully aware of the program, which is administered by OSI's Almaty office. End note.) The FCO's Chevening scholarship program, providing graduate education for young leaders and "future high fliers," has selected two winners from among 400 applicants, an MFA official and an American Bar Association-Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA-CEELI) lawyer. According to a British Embassy source, FM Ganiev's assistant, Sardor Rustambaev (formerly a Third Secretary on the Americas Desk), has received Ganiev's approval to participate in the program.

13. (C) The British DCM indicated that approximately 2,000 Uzbek students study in the UK each year, the vast majority on short-term English language programs paid for by themselves, with many over-staying their visas to work. The British Council's alumni coordinator added that there are over 350 alumni of British government sponsored programs in Uzbekistan. These include graduates of the FCO/OSI/university consortium, Chevening program, and Umid Foundation scholars. (Note: The Umid -- "Hope" -- Foundation was created by President Karimov in 1997 to support the study abroad of talented Uzbek youth. The Foundation provided students with scholarships ranging from \$35,000-100,000 to study at North American and European universities in return for committing to serve at least five years in the Uzbek government. The Umid Foundation has since been replaced by the Istedot -- "Talent" -- Foundation, which no longer offers long-term overseas study grants - ref B.) End note.)

14. (C) The First Deputy Rector of Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT), the only university in Central Asia offering British qualifications, told Poloff that the GOU has not discouraged students from enrolling or studying in the UK. (Note: WIUT was established in 2002 through a Cabinet of Ministers decree, in collaboration with the London-based University of Westminster and the Umid Foundation. It offers Bachelors degrees in business, economics and law. Most of the teaching staff are Uzbek citizens educated in the UK, Europe, or the United States. End note.) However, pressures on civil society over the past year, including in the educational sector (ref C), have compelled the First Deputy Rector to conduct regular risk assessments. Under an intergovernmental agreement between the GOU and British government, WIUT does not report to the

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GOU except for statistical data to the Tashkent Hokimiyat and Ministry of Economy; the First Deputy Rector is only accountable to the Vice Chancellor at Westminster University in London.

15. (C) WIUT's First Deputy Rector told Poloff that several children of top GOU officials study at the University including First Deputy Prime Minister Azimov's daughter, Foreign Minister Ganiev's son, the Tashkent Hokim's son, and a Presidential Adviser's son. (Note: These relationships, as well as WIUT's emphasis on business and economics, may help explain WIUT's good standing. End note.) The First Deputy Rector added that several senior University officials are National Security Service officers. The Senior Rector, Abdujabar Akhetov, is a former head of the National Security Service (NSS) Ferghana Valley branch. (Note: Akhetov has spent the past few weeks in Andijon under the guise of "supervising local elections," but in fact is most likely making sure that the first anniversary of the violence in Andijon passes smoothly. End note.)

16. (C) While commercially driven, WIUT received \$3.5 million in Umid funding. This provides forty scholarships per field of study each year, in return for students working five years in the public sector. Less than a quarter of WIUT's six hundred students pay tuition fees. (Note: The University has to re-pay scholarship funds for any student who fails to return from a study or work program abroad. End note.) WIUT's First Deputy Rector noted that while the \$4,800 annual tuition fees are high by local standards, they are still much lower than the cost of studying in the United Kingdom. According to the First Deputy Rector, President Karimov enjoys the bragging rights of having an international-quality educational institution in Tashkent. During his October 2005 visit to Malaysia for example, President Karimov reportedly boasted that Uzbekistan has a university meeting international standards. (Note: Around ten percent of WIUT's student body is international, largely from other Central Asian states. End note.) WIUT's First Deputy Rector also told Poloff that he welcomes the competition posed by the recent Presidential decree providing for the opening of a

Moscow State University branch in Tashkent (ref D).

17. (C) British Council representatives told us that their in-country English language training programs have faced some difficulties. In February for example, the Ministry of Defense cancelled a British Council-administered English language train-the-trainers program. The MFA has also asked the British Council to provide advance notification of programs and events, including lists of participants. In addition, British Council English language consultants have experienced delays in receiving Uzbek visas, although none have been refused. (Note: Delays in Uzbek visa issuance seems to be a widespread problem for many diplomatic missions and international organizations. End note.)

18. (C) The British Council's deputy director told Poloff that, other than the high cost of tuition fees and living expenses, the major obstacle faced by students wanting to study in the United Kingdom is obtaining British visas. He noted that the British Consul is reticent to issue visas to any student who might over-stay. Furthermore, in December 2005 the British Embassy stopped processing visa applications, except emergency medical visas, after the GOU removed its security barriers from in front of the British Embassy. (Note: In late 2005 the GOU began removing concrete security barriers from all diplomatic missions in Tashkent, including the U.S. Embassy, citing aesthetic and traffic/pedestrian flow concerns. End note.) Students must now travel to Almaty for visa interviews and processing, creating inconvenience and additional travel costs. (Note: The GOU has not shown any sign of restoring the security barriers to embassies in Tashkent. As a result, the British Embassy's visa section will remain shut for the foreseeable future. End note.)

19. (C) Comment: British educational programs have been less affected by Uzbekistan's growing isolation than our own educational programs. While the British Council has experienced some problems with in-country English language training programs, and students have faced greater hurdles in obtaining British visas, there do not seem to be direct GOU obstacles preventing students from studying in the United Kingdom. As a British diplomat noted recently, the GOU

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considers the British Government merely an irritant, while perceiving USG-sponsored programs as a destabilizing threat.

PURNELL